THE FADED FLOWER

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Author's Foreword

Foreword

LIFE is bitter-sweet. Suffering, sorrow and pain are often talked of as a vague, obscure mystery. But they are a revelation. They reveal life in its entirety; one discerns the undiscerned. They help the intellectual and emotional realisation of what is dim, obscure and indistinct with perfectness of vision and absolute intensity of apprehension. Sorrow is eternal. Joy, pleasure, frolic and laughter are for the perishable body, but sorrow is for the eternal soul. Behind joy there are temperaments sometimes rough and coarse and sometimes cold and callous. But behind

sorrow is Love in tense-fulness. If one concedes that out of Sorrow the world has been built, one will surely concede the world has been built by the secret hand of Love.

'*Who never ate his bread in sorrow,*
Who never spent the midnight hours
Weeping and waiting for the morrow,
He knows you not, ye! heavenly powers.'

(Goethe)

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THE FADED FLOWER

I

THE FADED FLOWER

The Lonely Child

VIKRAMAPURAM is a village in Tamil Nadu. It is called a village from a long custom, but its claim to that name is contestable. It is now a city—a delightful city; one smells all the sundry guarantees of human advancement—the liquor shops, mail trains, police force and matters of that description. It was a pleasant evening and Vikramapuram was smiling in the red splendour of the setting sun.

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A boy of about seven was slowly progressing through a narrow pathway in leisurely idleness staring at the half-ripened paddy fields and constant ebb and flow of the passers-by. The gentle south wind proceeded and mingled with the gold complexioned foliage in wholesome love-revel. There was perfect joy all round. Nature seemed to dance in mirth. The boy neared the bank of the beautiful Gomathi. The urchins were playing in their bird-spirit.

The child alone was sitting motionless, seeming to be the solitude of the mirth-full-world,—though this was not expected of him—with his dark eyes fixed on the chattering water of Gomathi over its stony course.

He was excluded by the other more

fortunate children. He did not speak, made no appeal, no complaint. He did not even reproach them: the irreproachable do not reproach.

Though his rough expulsion by other children drew no external sign of remonstrance from that little thing, his dark penetrating eyes spoke in their mute language, the mortification of neglect. His lips lost the rose, parted, shook violently, even as the dry leaves in the wind storm.

Expression of internal thoughts by human words can only be an imperfect and inadequate translation. The dark eyes that adorn the face, as the sun the vast universe, have a powerful language. Only you have to understand it, and decipher it. It is not like a plain cloudless sky,

nor has it the unpleasant dazzling brightness of the midday sun. But it has the mystic dim radiance of the rising moon.

The friend of the friendless, that divine nature extended her arms to the neglected child and caressed him, in the warbling notes of the birds in the rustling of the leaves and hundred of her other voices. The child lost himself in the mystic lull of the mother of the universe.

The sun went down. Dark clouds gathered suddenly to make the evening monstrous. It drizzled and the boy awoke from his dream. To his surprise he saw none on the bank, felt within himself a yearning to be at his home, in his mother's lap and started back running unmindful of the drizzling rain.

II

The Weeping Mother

SHE was beautiful as the summer morning, she was fair as the one flower adoring an icy wilderness—she was an angel. She was thin and transparent and through her transparency the angel in her could be seen. She was just a handful of matter, containing light and nothing but light. In short, she was an apology for a soul to exist on earth.

She was sitting all alone weeping. Her face was death pale and eyes, brimming with tears, were swollen. She

heaved a sigh now and then and muttered an occasional word or two.

The child, the moment he entered the house, ran to meet his dear mother and to be in her kindly arms; his face lighted with the torch of love. She extended her arms, wiping the tears, she had till that evening kept secret.

The boy was struck dumb with astonishment. Why she was weeping was what his child mind could not fathom. He was stupefied and his stupefaction was complicated with a vague dreamy sense of the dark reality of existence. He had not expected this welcome. Her weeping banished from his tender heart all the life and cheerfulness, as the cheerfulness is swept away from the landscape, when huge clouds drift, in serpent like coils, athwart the face of the sun.

He rose from his stupefaction, saw his weeping mother, flew to her trembling arms and sobbed without knowing what he was doing. Hers mingled with his: and both wept violently.

He wanted to speak to his mother, ask her why she was weeping and tell her something; but he could not. His little pallid lips sternly refused their office.

She unsuccessfully forced a lifeless smile mingled with tears, kissed him tenderly on his bright fore-head, and comforted him, "Darling, don't weep. God will be kinder towards you. Don't weep. It breaks my heart."

Recovering at the tender caresses of his mother he asked. "Why do you weep mother? Have I done any thing

wrong?" What could she say in reply? She only kissed him. Thought imprisoned frets to find a vent and even without her knowing it, the words 'It is my fate' rushed out in lightning-speed.

The words 'It is my fate' could have no meaning to him. In wonder he asked in his childish innocence, "What is that *thing* mother? Is it such a nasty thing as to make one weep? I don't like it. We don't want it."

The startled mother sat dumb staring at her innocent child. Her silent stare conveyed no meaning to him and he, passing his tender arms warmly round her neck and drawing it closer to him, said. "Where is father, mother? Gone to Madras? Then he will surely bring me new dresses. Will he not?"

Then reducing his red lips to a rose bud and in a tone expressive of his injured pride added 'Kamala' and 'Nanu' come new-dressed every day. They would not take me as their play mate."

Being invigorated by his mother's fresh kisses and carried away by his imagination that his father would bring him new dresses, he jumped from dress to his Yates Reader and continued in one breath, "I want to show father my English book. I read all my lessons. I know the piece, 'Twinkle, twinkle little star' by heart. I repeat now, if you don't mind. How much pleased he would be if I tell him I scored fifteen out of twenty in recitation. The first boy got..."

There was no end to his childish prattle. Could a mother stand a child's request? She could not say nay, nor

could she provide him with what he asked. She was hoplessly helpless, she was deserted. Dark clouds gathered before her and she burst forth into tears.

The heavenly sympathy with Padma, that was her name, was in evidence by the terrible out-pouring mingled with thunder and lightning, outside, full of pathos and terror.

III

The Past History

SHE belonged to a rich family, consisting of her kind paternal uncle, his wife and children. They lived there for many generations past in so respectable a manner as to gain the good opinion of the people of Pandy and her uncle was no exception. He was rather selfish to some extent, but withal a decent man with good tastes and generous heart. He was well respected by the people of Pandy for he conducted himself well in the discharge of his ordinary duties. He would surely

have been more respected, had he been blessed with a more amiable wife. His intense love for her and her narrow mindedness gave occasion among the villagers to speak a word or two about him, when they were light of heart. He loved his wife dearly but his love for his wife did not stand in the way of his love for his only niece. Nothing she had desired was ever willingly denied to her by the Rip Van Winkle of her uncle.

As she grew of age, he married her to his neighbour, a parentless youth of modest and amiable disposition, and invited and received him into his family as a son.

Padma and her husband remained there for several months, not from any disinclination to move but because he

could hear of no vacant situation to which he could apply. The increased contempt shown by her aunt made her stay impossible and she urged her husband to move.

One day they left for Vikramapuram, a market for all kinds of pursuits. The place new, and friends none, to recommend him to some business place, he could not secure for many weeks a footing. The first experience of misfortune did not sink the couple. The less kind they found fortune, the more they expected from her sooner or later, as every new revolution of her wonderful wheel might lift them up.

Yea! At last the Fortune smiled on them. He secured a post on a decent salary. God in his goodness blessed them with a child and for seven years

they were happy with their darling, the pledge of their married life, without the thought of morrow. Their life was a sun-shiny one.

But did it last long? No. The summer sky was faced by the prospect of a winter cloud.

There are a sort of human beings in all the modernly civilized towns and Vikramapuram is one. They are the malcontents of creation. They are a body of vagabonds of all places and of all communities with one idea, one purpose and common calling; though interest conflicting. Their calling is trade. They trade on youthfull ignorance. They do not steal. They are no thieves—hence no law against them. You can see them push open a house, enter and rub shoulder with

aristocratic youths, zamindars—all with propriety. This freternity of vagabonds have a social status; They are the companions of the rich.

A youth of tender age who comes under their influence losses himself. They abort humanity in retouching it. Oh! They add something to Creator's work. They are masters in remaking creation for worse, a goodly attempt to lead men back to beasts. Their handiwork is a masterpiece in retrogression.

Padma's husband fell a prey to that monstrous fraternity. They took away his look, his flesh, memory and all. He turned a wild drunkard.

The sweet endearing faces of his child and wife failed to tempt him back to his former life. He spent all his income on

women and drink. Months passed, he hurled himself headlong the downward course. The misery and wretchedness increased at home. This was the history of the weeping Padma.

IV

The Dark Night

IT was nine. The night meal was over. Padma was sitting by the side of her slumbering boy, staring at him enveloped in her wild thoughts.

The rain had stopped, the moon risen. The clear moon flooded the sky with its liquid silver. The billows of the distant sea lulled the weary earth after a toilsome day; "Endless are the beauties of this earth and of earth's inhabitants," being the theme of the lullaby. There was deep stillness everywhere, except in her.

He entered the house, the monster, the ruin of a man with eyes red and steps unsteady, and bearing on him further marks of excessive intoxication.

She rose and stood before him motionless like a statue. Her youthful tender figure, divinely tall and exceedingly delicate in its outline seemed like a tensely struck musical instrument of gold ready to break out in mourning music at the least pressure. She suffered an internal agitation. Was she to fall upon his feet, and beg him return to his former life? Or was she to keep quiet? How to begin? How to end? She thought over all the details that how she should behave, how she should open the topic? Nothing came out of it. She was dumb in utter confusion with tears fllowing from her distracted eyes down her pale cheeks.

He walked to and fro, showing restlessness and suddenly broke the silence and said pointing to the only chain apart from the sacred thread, "I want the chain—your husband. Should I teach you the Dharma of a wife." This he said and laughed the reckless laughter of a thousand Bhairaki-vagabonds in their hookas.

She had till recently known no other God on earth than him; his words her law, his smiles her sunshine, his commonplaces listened to, as eagerly as though they were the words of wisdom—his wishes and freaks obeyed with a servile devotion. She had been his willing slave, his blind worshipper. But now the torturous neglects and continued faithlessness came upon her as a slow fever; her allegiance had failed her, her submissive spirit rebelled and disowned any more obedience.

She broke out in the strain of an angry parrot "Why? To starve us ....me and my darling......to feed your flesh and that of vile......" Speech failed her. Tears took the office of her tongue. She could not proceed.

A thud was heard—the angel was on the floor emptying her eye-springs. The monster disappeared with the chain. No call from her to him, nor from him to her.

There was on both sides a mute acceptance of widening distance between them. She seemed to realise. What? Darkness—deadly darkness devoid of hope.

She felt restless. She felt the heaviness of the night. Every second seemed to her a minute and every minute an hour.

She had longed for the dawn. But would it dawn upon her as it dawns upon the world ? She asked. The thought of morrow was what she could not think. She trembled, she wished it never dawned.

The intensely painful memory of her husband's vehement protestations of love on that nuptial night and nights following brought in her rose-lost lips a dry and life-less smile.

She reflected thus :—"He told me ! I believed—I thought, as any woman would, he told me truly—oh what a dissembler !—I thought—heart's outburst ....yes, he said, that consummate lier, that night—he came by my bed drew me soft to his bosom, holding my face softly in his arm placed

between......my...married brows—(as he called then) a kiss........he said,

'How I love you! my beloved!—God alone knows. Vaster than land, farther than Heaven, deeper than the unfathomed deep is my love......'

I forgot myself, I felt a strange thrill. Oh! I felt myself elevated and felt that a third eye was opened where he imprinted that kiss—verily I had a consecration.........

He was restless. He shoved me this side and that, twisted my lock in his fingers, pulled down the flowers about my head and toyed with them. In the absence of a thought for further mischieves he left my lock hanging over my face......And he said,

'Is there a flower more divine-tender, a flower more fragrant-sweet —I tell not vain words, my angel! I tell you truly—than the tresses of my beloved, so divine-tender, so ravishing sweet. Hark to the humming honey bees that distill honey from thousand flowers, if they do not say Yea.'

I smiled......he added again.

'What is moon but for you? It is only the focus ring of the light of your bright face. He rises weak, weak also he sets, brightest he is when he is near by you.........

'Your coral lips the fountain head of learing and.........

'Your prattle the music.........

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......And hundred other things—he swore by the lotus eyed Lord, the God Vishnu.

Such were her lugubrious reflections. No dagger would be so sharp. No sword-thrust would be so torturously killing. She trembled, she burst forth in feeble lingering syllables thus:—

"Oh ! love. I never knew you are so fickle, you seem only to be a pretence from the beginning to the end. It is the same moon that shed its silver over our bed, setting our hearts in mellow vibration. It is the same cuckoo that sang to say that 'Love is endless in its bound and enternal in its duration' and 'the cessation of which even for a moment can never be imagined.' It is the same wind that, with the fragrance of thousand flowers, encroached upon our bed at nights

to give vigour and life that love's revel might endlessly prolong. Where is that fondness......that depth of feeling......with which............you are...........associated? Where is he.........? Where am I.........? And you, feeble love.........?

A shudder ran through her whole frame. She buried her face in her lotus palm. She felt herself outside the pale of men and life. She intensely wished she melted into nothingness even then. He betrayed her, he faild her. Would *God* fail her!

She streched out her trembling arms, only to catch darkness. She sank. Would it not be good, she asked, in her utter helplessness, to die. When, the slumbering innocent placed his arm on her. This touch, this rare touch, dispelled her dark thought of self-

slaughter even as the sunlight the darkness. She could not die and she would not die. The child had none but her to look after him—the innocent little thing. But the question of living faced her. She had no wherewithal to live. What was she to do between those two silences—the mute cold fate and the deaf husband? The despairing Padma directed her glance at the sleeping child, full of pain. It was twelve.

All at once she heard a knock at the door. It was a strange alarming knock. It was enough to drive one mad at that hour of night. She was not frightened; she advanced boldly. To one for whom silence has been dreadful, a howl is comforting. She opened the door. She beheld him, her husband+trembling, groaning and all his clothes dipped

in blood. The drunkard was run down. Padma wept over her additional misfortune—that was all that she could do.

V

The Patient

IT was morning. The faint grey streak of dawn smiled a smile of a new born babe, in the eastern horizon. But it did not smile on Padma. It dawned only to the same consciousness of misery in which she was, when it had set the previous evening.

He slowly opened his eyes and his first gaze met the eyes of his sorrowing wife. He made an effort to speak, to raise himself on his

elbows, all in vain. Perspiration ran, his whole frame was bathed in it.

He stared at his wife and the approaching child. A light proceeded from her pale face and burnt into him searching to scorch the darkness in him. A colour rose in his worn-out face, once voluptuous. He pressed the child that was eagerly awaiting a warm welcome, close to him and sought the red lips. The paternal instinct reappeared, repentance set in and tears flowed down his flesh-less cheeks—it was the work of the magical red lips of his little child.

Red lips are more potent than a sorcerer's wand. It makes a monster, man; a man, God;—sublimest feat of legerdemain! Oh! they are devinely divine.

Two days passed, a little improvement was perceptible. To every enquiry he replied that he felt better; which he tried to prove by engaging himself in talk and reading.

But a night set in. It was a restless and feverish night. The repose of the patient, became more and more disturbed. His continual change of postures, frequent groans and inarticulate sounds of complaints and all terrified her. She perceived that he was not quite himself and felt his pulse eagerly. The low and unusually quicker pulse increased her alarm. How much she longed for the consoling looks of a doctor then beside the bed. But where to go for money to pay the medical man was the question? The situation faced her terribly; she wept like a child in despair.

The ill-fated Padma set out—a determination shining on her face—walked street after street indefinitely and at last stood at the end of a long avenue; her spirit being some way below nothing. For, she had no idea in what part of the town she could find the object of her search—she was searching to find one who would pay her money on the pledge of her last jewel, the golden thread which had so long supported that sacred piece of gold,—the wedlock.

Haply a passer-by whom she happened to meet, directed her and she walked a little distance taking that direction until she came to a shop where she found a man of about forty years seated before an odd little wooden chest,

his legs gathered in cross in quite an Indian way.

He cannot go for a handsome man, for his face was large and excessively strong, with his nose projecting like a sword. His eyes were small but so keen that it seemed to be aimed at something unseen and distant like the point of a master-archer's arrow, yet able to turn in lightning flash to terror-strike something near at hand. His countenance was gentle and his address gentlemanly. In short, his general appearance was not unpleasing, though not handsome.

Money he lent, but he was never known to be cruel. He helped the needy rather than lent out money as business. Whenever generosity is the theme, one could be

sure, his name would not be left unmentioned.

She entered the shop and addressed him if he would buy jewellery.

To which, "I do, madam. But we do not pretend to offer high terms—you know every purchase means a fresh risk. Well, let me see," was his gentle reply. But all the same his arrow-like eyes were busy with their work.

She was impressed with his polite behaviour and said in a collected tone, though with eyes downcast lest they should betray the anxiety that lurked behind the question. "I have a piece of jewellery to sell, and would like to know if you care to buy it."

As she spoke she placed her last jewel — that gold thread before him. Her pretended strength failed her. She shuddered, her whole frame shook violently. A great mist gathered in her eyes; which could do no more now than threaten weeping as the glands have almost been already wept dry. The generous man watched her. The hidden sympathy rushed out surging in his speaking eyes. For a minute or two he was silent and broke out astonished "What is this, child? What has made you do this? Could I know that I may do something......?"

His words invited confidence. She hesitated first and being encouraged by that generous man tried to speak. A lump rose in her throat; she could not speak. Recovering herself a little she narrated her past history

and said, in her cuckoo strain "I never thought the veil of gloom would so cruelly be drawn in the morning of my life. My husband ....I don't blame him......he was trapped foully by the ever ready wolves. Why? Not even they......my fate......my ill fate, I blame none. He is so alarmingly ill as to necessitate immediate medical attendance." It was more than music. It was the speech of a golden *veena* in human tongue.

The prosperous merchant had never forgotten — a rare memory that—that, what he was, he owed to Padma's father whose ready hand was always available to cross a crisis or two, he had in his business career. He offered some money saying, "Child! Then you are my late friend's daughter! You don't know how I once had the

timely help of your father. Take this sum and also your jewel."

Padma retraced her steps back—homeward.

VI

The Door Was Closed

THE arrival of the hackney carriage announced the physician, a buxom small man with more holes in his coat than buttons for them. The routine examination and the questionarie being over, his looks showed despair—of his fees, and said in a more assuring manner that his treatment could not generally fail even when his services were called for late. Two days passed and the situation continued with no variation. But the doctor talked boldly, unlike the first day,

of a speedy recovery, and the expectations of those, who used to visit the patient, were also cheerful. But Padma alone was having her misgivings. The many hours of each day in which she was left entirely alone only proved favourable for the admission of many a melancholic mood and she tried to reason herself out of fears, the different contradictory announcements of the doctor that seemed to render any positive hope absurd. The third day, the gloomy anticipations were however done away with, for the doctor declared that his patient was considerably better, his pulse was much stronger and the general symptoms more favourable than on the preceding visit.

But the day did not close as it had begun. Towards the evening, he

became ill again growing more and more heavy, restless and uncomfortable than before. The assertive declaration by the doctor 'he would recover soon' lodged some hope in some corner of her mind; and she was willing to attribute the change to nothing more than to fatigue of having sat up to have his diet. At last she saw him with satisfaction, sink into a slumber, from which she expected beneficial effect.

But that was not to be. His sleep lasted a considerable time, but was not so quiet as she had expected. She sat by him the whole night anxious to know the effect. To her surprise the slumber was so frequently disturbed that she felt the necessity to send for the doctor. Her small fund of money was run

out and she was in the abyss of confusion.

When suddenly the rolling of a carriage that had stopped at the door brought that kindly money-lender. She felt his arrival comforting at that hour. He clearly saw her fears and difficulties. He listened to all in silent sympathy and offered to bring the doctor with a readiness that seemed to speak the occasion.

A week passed, a slow improvement was in evidence. Padma strove to win him back by caresses and entreaties. In her eagerness to please him and thus win him back, she practised a hundred of those arts of her sex. All her arts proved effectless. Her silence annoyed him as much as her speech. He would

peevishly and with an oath ask her why she held her tongue and looked so glum or roughly check her when speaking and bid her not talk nonsense. Nothing she did or said pleased him. All Medea's efforts failed to tempt Jason back.

Thus things sailed in the gloomy weather ever threatening an out-burst of storm. One morning storm set in. Padma met the cold stare of her husband. She felt the coldness, sharp and trembled from head to foot. The monster shouted "Get away woman. Let me see your face no more."

Padma was earthquaked; a shock, so sudden, so unexpected. She felt to be hunted; and broke out,

"What do you mean? I do not understand you. What have I done?"

"You cannot......understand, woman! you will not understand. I mean him ......he......he......out strumpet," shouted the monster.

A shudder ran through her whole frame. She stood mute to the accusation he made. She felt, herself at the freezing top of misery. The ink pot was upset on the white sheet of life; all was dark and formless. She did not weep—she laughed.

The monster got up in violent fury, and pushed Padma—the angel—out.

A clap was heard—that was the closing of the door behind her.

THE DOOR WAS CLOSED

Angry clouds gathered in the sky like a messenger of the God of wrath, dark-screening the festive-day, as if to devour all husbands.

VII

The Flower Faded

When Padma, the discarded angel, recovered from insensibility, she looked wildly around seeming to experience a sensation indescribably strange; a sort of dreamy confused consciousness; a dreaded state between half wakefulness and sleep. Dark mass of moisture-laden clouds hung gloomily in the sky. She felt that book of life was completely closed to her, and looked to the sky for a ray of light and in dismay, "Are Gods gone mad? Is it the jest of Gods

in their unmannerly scheme of things?" she asked.

A voice came to her in whisper—it was so distinct, to say, "Child! come to my arms. I am here."

The startled Padma looked on all sides to know wherefrom this mysterious whisper came. No one was seen; the road was completely empty of traffic. She was astounded; her heart seemed to stop beating.

Again that whisper came; it rang in her ears distinctly. She again looked all round her and suddenly got up. A color rose in her faded cheeks; a marvellous strength seemed to embrace her from every side. She thought that she had endless freedom of the endlessly free wind, she could go

wherever she pleased and do what ever she liked; and no power, earthly or divine, could prevent her, put obstacles in her way. Mad with this inspiration Padma walked with determined steps, even as the *Eternal Truth* that is invincible in the end towards its final goal of Victory facing odds of *Non-Truth.*

It was twelve, the night was so strangely still as to dread one of the immediate prospect of an impending storm. In that hour of so black a night, as ever a fugitive or a murderer desired, Padma alone was progressing indefinitely on the trafficless road endlessly stretching.

About an hour passed and suddenly a strong wind in its acrobatic coil of contortions, stumbling like a tipsy

vagabond filled the air with dust heralding the Storm-God. The dreaded God of Storm ushered in the sky knawing his giant teeth in thunderous uproar, waving fast his cloud flag of doom, and scratching the blue sky with his bright sword seeming to be intent on direr inclemencies.

The rain poured and poured, water-soaking the whole earth, conveying an impression of a sponge dipped in water. The rows of huge trees on either side of the road swayed from side to side, like a balance-lost drunkard, sighing and groaning.

Yet the angel was on her way, now and then halting under the green foliage of trees that refused that protection, they extend to-

way-farers in the fiercest heat of sunny days. She was wet through, her whole frame was clotted in mud, and she walked unmindful.

It was likely between two and three. The rain had stopped, the gloom in the sky slowly began to disappear. The moon showed his pale face, so pale as that of a patient's at dawn after a sleepless night. Padma grew tired of walking; her tender feet unaccustomed to walking, got weary and sternly function-refused. She took shelter under the ruined roof of the remnant of a huge choultry.

A bird or two by the bamboo clumps by the distant homes announced the coming of dawn by their morning melodies.

The first to catch Padma was a villager who approaching her, said "Child! Whither bound? What made you go alone? You look troubled. Why?"

She stared at him. She was at present unable to think that male sex was capable of such kindness. She wondered if she was yet in touch with the world. She was mute to his questionings. The passer-by again pressed her to reply and added, "Where do you go? Where do you live? What part of the village? Any relation near by? I shall see you home, if you don't mind."

Her very existance perplexed her, her consciousness remained. She could feel no sort of intimacy with the world. She felt herself far far

removed from the world of her enquirer.

She replied in surprising abruptness "I have none, none in this world. Where bound?.........bound towards my God, to secure his blessing unto my child,"

Her indifferent reply, her strange looks, pale face, added to it walking by night and all gave her an aspect of a mad woman and the astounded enquirer walked his way taking her to be mad.

It was morning; it was noon; it was evening. She walked the day like one dazed, giving out now and then "What could I do, what could I do" seeming to stir up the

mute creator to action. She had not eaten, taken no rest.

She approached a house or two and applied for a morsal of food. She was refused. The woman-folk did not like the puzzling abstraction in Padma. Woman, being a mystery themselves, do not like mystery in others. Here they stand contrasted with men.

Man admires that which he does not understand. The more is the abstraction in a thing, the more he admires; but woman hates that which is beyond her comprehension. The women-folk could not understand Padma, they did not like her. They turned her out; one called her mad, the second said "she is pretending and there is a purpose" and the third, "a thief."

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The village that offered its shelter to thousands of men and women seemed to Padma like a steel trap; she longed to have a way out. The veins on her forehead throbbed and she felt as if her head would burst. The sense of pain and dejection had their full play of hide and seek. She could not endure it, she ran wildly screaming 'God! What shall I do, what have I done?' untill she came to a pool by the side of the village, where, she sat by the huge peepul tree that stood on the bank and laid her throbbing head on its trunk.

Slowly all her thoughts began to vanish, and her mind was almost a vacuum except for that one thought—the thought of her little child. Again and again the image of her little

darling rose before her mental vision. His name alone found its way through her dry throat.

It was nine, it was twelve, it was one. She closed her eyes, a deep and intense peace filled her heart. A supreme deliverence seemed to kiss her on every side from the infinite sky. The presence of her child grew and grew till it filled the infinity. The whole universe became enveloped by the child and in the presence of that little thing all thought vanished, all pain abated and consciousness itself closed. The bubble filled with hot vapour of pain did then burst and there was neither darkness nor light, nor misery, nor pain, nor sorrow; but infinite peace, infinite joy—**Anand.**

It dawned; and the first rays of

the morning sun kissed the earth and life blossomed in wholesome festive-brightness everywhere. Padma alone was sleeping, her head thrown on the trunk of the tree in the easy attitude of repose, with an expression of smile lit on her angelic face. One by one the villagers who went to the pool for their morning bath thronged near the tree and all their efforts to wake her up were futile. "She is dead. She is too holy to be earth's"............

The flower faded.

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